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Overland Road Historic Trail

Early day travelers near Williams.
Photo courtesy of Sharlot Hall Museum.

United States Department of Agriculture

PREPARED BY Forest Service

Kaibab National Forest

Journey Into Tierra Incognita

In 1863, mountain man Joseph Reddeford Walker and a small crew of adventurers struck gold in the unexplored heart of the newly designated Arizona Territory. The discovery was along the headwaters of the Hassayamnpa River, in an area the prospectors had entered in defiance of a warning by local Apaches to stay out. The United States Government, eager to find a means to replenish a treasury seriously depleted by the Civil War, quickly offered to send a military contingent to protect the new strike.

The problem was how to get there. The discovery was located in an area of such fierce topography and equally fierce natives that it had resisted colonization by Spaniards, Mexicans, and Americans for over three centuries. On maps it was labeled "Tierra Incognita" — the unknown land.

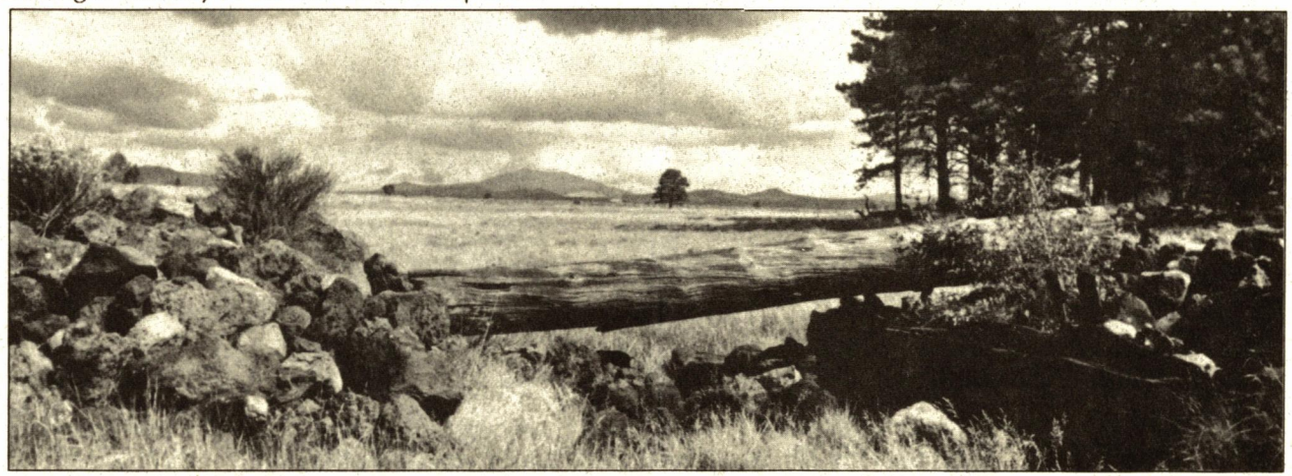
The prospectors had taken a course that was long and difficult, along a southern route complicated by scorching deserts and hostile Apaches. Gold fever demanded a more direct approach. The route that offered the most promise headed west from Ft. Wingate, New Mexico, along the road built in 1859 by Lieutenant Edward F. Beale. From Antelope Springs (Flagstaff), a new route would have to be blazed southwest across a volcanic, rock-covered plateau which the Spanish called *malpais* (badlands) and on through the precipitous canyons that cut the southern edge of the Colorado Plateau.

An experienced prospector and fortune hunter named Robert Groom offered to scout the way to the gold fields for Captain Nathaniel J. Pishon and his troop of twenty-seven men in the summer of 1863. Under Groom's leadership, the party arrived in twenty-eight days with little trouble. Some say they found their way so easily because they used a Hopi Indian trail through the area, but this has never been confirmed.

A short time after that initial trip, Pishon returned with a second, larger caravan over the route now known as Overland Road. This expedition, under the command of Major Edward Willis, established Fort Whipple, named after an explorer who preceded Beale across northern Arizona. Within the year, another expedition arrived from Cincinnati, Ohio, bringing the members of the first territorial government to Arizona's first capital city, Prescott.

Because of its "fearful roughness" and sometimes hostile natives, the movement to replace Overland Road began virtually as soon as it was completed. Alternate roads were surveyed into the area as early as 1864 from Yuma and La Paz along the Colorado River, and from Winslow to the east. The old road continued to be used for access from the north, but its bad reputation assured an early demise. By 1890 it had been abandoned as a major travel route.

The life span of Overland Road may have been short, but the course it followed through the rough and rugged rim country continues to serve a variety of uses. After prospectors clattered off to the next treasure hunt, this corridor became an important livestock driveway over which huge herds of sheep and cattle were driven to and from summer ranges on the Colorado Plateau. Narrow gauge railroads built to serve the logging industry followed the historic route into the area's extensive forests. Even today, travel continues along portions of Overland Road within the Kaibab National Forest as sections of various Forest Service roads.



An abandoned railroad grade follows the course of the Overland Road along the edge of Garland Prairie.

Overland Road Today

The Hassayampa gold boom has long since gone bust but modern day pathfinders can still find a mother lode of history, scenic beauty, and outdoor enjoyment along the 30 miles of Overland Road that have been retraced across the Kaibab National Forest.

Traveling from east to west, as Pishon and Groom did, one first encounters the wide grasslands of Garland Prairie. Dotted with hardscrabble homesteads, both active and deserted, its vistas still inspire visions of hardy pioneers.

Farther along, the old road enters the trees and passes the remains of an old way-station which even boasted its own post office for a time. The foundations of a few cabins are still visible here.

The markers that blaze the trail then wind on through the forest, past remains of a narrow gauge railroad bed and an abandoned logging camp, past scenic Pomeroy Tanks and historic Whiting Ranch. Along the way, you'll see evidence of a Depression-era Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) camp and the course of the Bear Springs Sheep Driveway that tens of thousands of animals once traveled over the edge of the rugged Mogollon Rim.

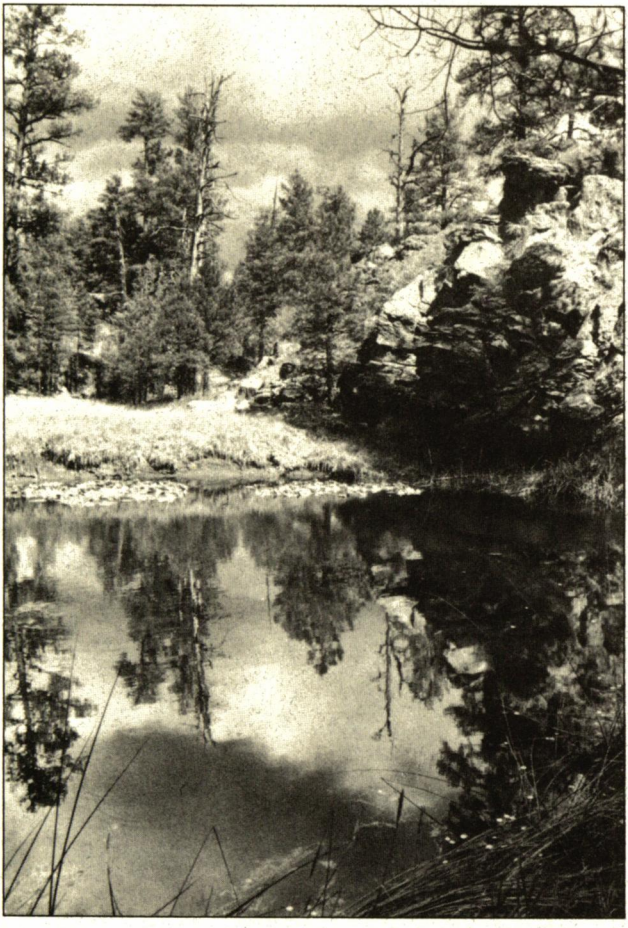
And as you retrace these historic steps you'll see evidence of other forest uses too, of timber sales and reforestation projects, of hunters, woodcutters and recreationists all here to use and enjoy some feature of this diverse and productive land, just as you are.

Even The Trees Talk History

"A mile or so beyond (Dow Spring) we found stuck on a tree a note . . . signed by Lieutenant Pomeroy (of the First California Infantry) . . . It informed us that the road ahead was nearly impassable; that the Apaches had stolen forty of his mules and were in open hostilities; that twenty miles on, the road passed through dense woods where the greatest watchfulness would be necessary."

Judge Joseph Pratt Allyn

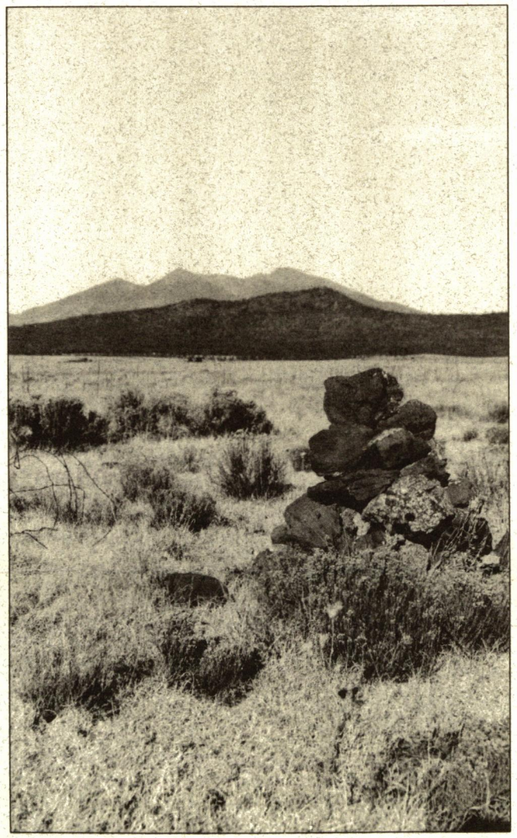
First Supreme Court Justice of the Arizona Territory and member of the third expedition to travel Overland Road.



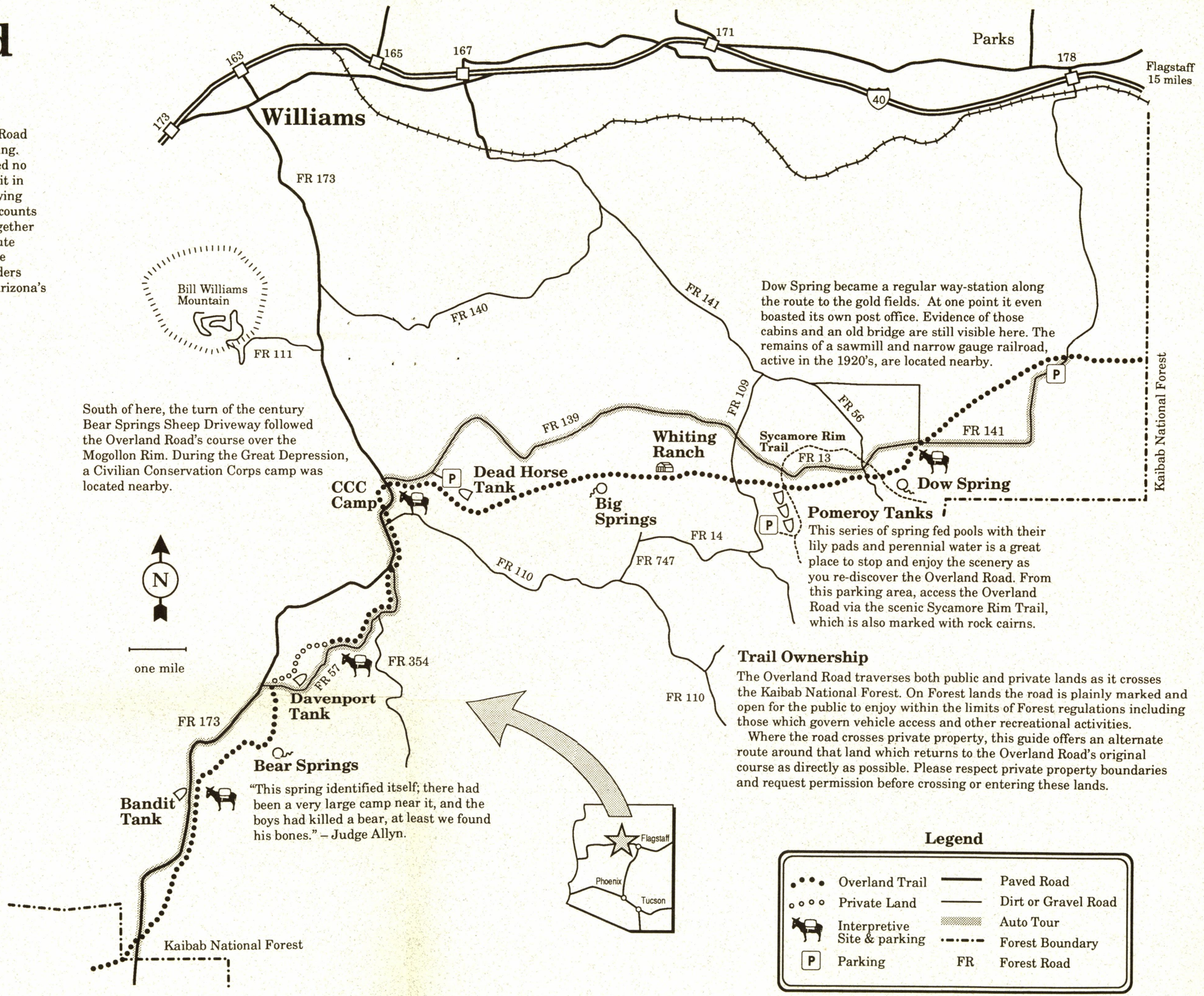
Pomeroy Tanks along the Overland Road.

Overland Trail

As with so many things born of gold rushes, the Overland Road faded into history almost as quickly as it had come into being. "By 1900 most maps of the former Tierra Incognita included no evidence of the Overland Road," writes Dr. James W. Byrkit in a report produced for the Kaibab National Forest. By studying nineteenth-century maps, personal diaries, and historic accounts of the Hassayampa Gold Rush, Byrkit was able to piece together the road's original route from Flagstaff to Prescott. The route was then retraced on the ground and marked with rock-pile cairns and brass cap monuments so contemporary pathfinders could follow its rough and rugged course back into one of Arizona's most tumultuous eras.



"After leaving the Beale Trail, (in Flagstaff) they found the road extremely rough and many of their wagons were broken." - Thomas Edwin Farish
History of Arizona, Volume II


Williams
Parks
Flagstaff
15 miles
163
165
167
171
173
178
40
FR 173
Bill Williams Mountain
FR 111
FR 140
FR 141
Dow Spring became a regular way-station along the route to the gold fields. At one point it even boasted its own post office. Evidence of those cabins and an old bridge are still visible here. The remains of a sawmill and narrow gauge railroad, active in the 1920's, are located nearby.
South of here, the turn of the century Bear Springs Sheep Driveway followed the Overland Road's course over the Mogollon Rim. During the Great Depression, a Civilian Conservation Corps camp was located nearby.
FR 109
FR 56
FR 139
Whiting Ranch
Sycamore Rim Trail
FR 13
FR 141
P
Dead Horse Tank
CCC Camp
Big Springs
Dow Spring
Pomeroy Tanks
FR 14
FR 747
FR 110
N
one mile
FR 354
FR 57
Davenport Tank
FR 173
Bear Springs
"This spring identified itself; there had been a very large camp near it, and the boys had killed a bear, at least we found his bones." – Judge Allyn.
Bandit Tank
Flagstaff
Phoenix
Tucson
Kaibab National Forest
Kaibab National Forest

Pomeroy Tanks
This series of spring fed pools with their lily pads and perennial water is a great place to stop and enjoy the scenery as you re-discover the Overland Road. From this parking area, access the Overland Road via the scenic Sycamore Rim Trail, which is also marked with rock cairns.

Trail Ownership

The Overland Road traverses both public and private lands as it crosses the Kaibab National Forest. On Forest lands the road is plainly marked and open for the public to enjoy within the limits of Forest regulations including those which govern vehicle access and other recreational activities.

Where the road crosses private property, this guide offers an alternate route around that land which returns to the Overland Road's original course as directly as possible. Please respect private property boundaries and request permission before crossing or entering these lands.

Legend

Overland Trail	Paved Road
Private Land	Dirt or Gravel Road
Interpretive Site & parking	Auto Tour
P Parking	Forest Boundary
	FR Forest Road

Printed 9/90 on recycled stock.

Hike, Bring Your Horse, Mule, or Covered Wagon But . . .

Travel on stretches of Overland Road which have remained relatively undisturbed since the days of pioneers is restricted to the same modes of transportation available in the days of the Hassayampa gold strike. That excludes passenger cars, 4-wheel drive vehicles, ATCs, dirt bikes, and mountain bikes.

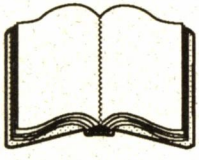
But this doesn't mean you have to "rough it" to visit this historic attraction. You can retrace Overland Road in your car or on your mountain bike where it now exists as a Forest Service road or closely parallels one. Interpretive stations and parking areas further enhance the route's accessibility near locations that have special historic significance or offer outstanding recreation opportunities. Consult the map found on the inside of this brochure.

Please remember to leave historic sites, artifacts and other cultural remains undisturbed for others to enjoy.

For more information about Overland Road contact:

Northern Arizona Natural History Association
P.O. Box 1633
Flagstaff, AZ 86002
(602) 527-7474

Read more about Historic Overland Road. Visit your local library or book store.



Recreational maps of the Kaibab National Forest can be purchased at your local Forest Service office or sporting goods store.

For More Information On This Trail, Contact:

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